

„Improved Safety of Women in Serbia and Montenegro“

Project (2020 - 2023)

The Brief Overview of the Evaluation



Introduction

This brief overview presents the main findings, lessons learnt, conclusions and recommendations of the final evaluation of the Project Improved Safety of Women in Serbia and Montenegro (abbreviation ISWS MN project) implemented in the period 01/01/2020 - 31/12/2023 by UN Women Programme Office in Serbia.

Context: Republic of Serbia published the third edition of the gender equality index in October 2021. The Republic scored 52.4 points in 2016, 55.8 in 2018, and 58.0 in 2021. This indicates continuous, albeit not rapid, progress in improving gender equality. Montenegro achieved a score of 59.3 out of 100 in the gender equality index in 2023, which is a progress from 55 in 2019. Asymmetric gender regimes, patriarchal culture, history of recent conflicts in the region and economic hardships contributed to the relatively high prevalence of various forms of gender-based violence in Serbia. The results show that in Montenegro, one in five women (20.2% of women) reported experienced violence by intimate partner during lifetime. The legislative framework for gender equality of the Republic of Serbia and in Montenegro are guided by the obligations under the key international legal instruments.

Project Background: The Project is implemented in Serbia and Montenegro and focuses on improving the status of women and enabling them to live lives without gender-based discrimination and violence. It is implemented due to generous support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), co-funded by UN Women, and in partnership with the Ministry of Justice Montenegro, Commissioner for Protection of Equality in Serbia, women's civil sector organizations in Serbia and Montenegro and media in Serbia. The project is focused on increasing the knowledge and capacities of police and justice system actors in Montenegro for better realization of urgent measures for victim protection against perpetrators of violence, through the implementation of bracelet for victim(s) and perpetrator(s) system (EMS). In addition, there is a focus on strengthening the capacities of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality and women's civil sector organizations on awareness of rural women on the protection from violence and gender-based discrimination. Finally, the project intervention is aimed at advancing the knowledge and skills of journalists and editors about the risks of gender stereotyping when reporting about violence against women and girls and femicide, particularly in the online sphere.

Approach and Methodology: The evaluation was conducted by three independent evaluators and was completed between July 2023 to December 2023. The evaluation purpose was to assess the programmatic progress and performance of the intervention from the point of view of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, gender and human rights and added values. The findings of the evaluation will hopefully contribute to organizational learning, future decision-making, and effective programming and accountability. The evaluation used theory based and contribution analysis approach, aiming to describe how the project worked and created a desired change, explaining the causalities between resources, activities, short and long-term outcomes. From a forward-looking perspective, the evaluation also aimed to provide action-oriented recommendations to UN Women in Serbia and the donor. The methodology employed mixed methods including quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (documentation review, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, online survey) and analytical approaches to understand complexity of the processes. Gender equality and empowerment of women (GEEW) and human rights were integrated in the approach, including evaluation criteria and questions, and in generation of findings, conclusions and recommendations. In total, 46 key informants (38 women and 2 men) were interviewed and more than 70 key documents, including project documentation, research, analyses and legal and policy documents were reviewed. The evaluation adhered to UN Women and UN Evaluation Group standards and policies. Conclusions and

recommendations are based on gender related data and gender analysis. Evaluation took into account UN commitment on disability inclusion and covered disability through evaluation questions. Any observed limitation was compensated through triangulation of data and methods.

Evaluation conclusion and findings

Relevance: Project's goals and objectives align with the priorities and needs of the recipient countries, and they address the issues that remain of high importance and significance to the intended beneficiaries and are consistent with their development goals and policies.

Not all de facto ambitions (which all remain relevant) are appropriately articulated in the project design, in particular those related to socio-economic status or rural women.

Design is perceived as complex and with some degree of overambition and requiring hybrid project operation, which should have been recognized and later reflected in the overall design and implementation plans. Implementation de facto included detailed planning and structured processes, but also agile or iterative methods that allowed for needed flexibility and adequate responsiveness to changing circumstances.

Continuous focus on women's and girls' safety remains fundamental to ensuring the well-being, human rights, and broader societal development in both Serbia and in Montenegro.

Key finding 1 (R_KF_1)

The project is and remains fully relevant for the context of the needs and priorities of Serbia and Montenegro. It addresses the priorities, needs and gaps of various stakeholders which were included in the project design and its implementation, as project partners or beneficiaries, including law/justice enforcement agencies and bodies; equality protection body (including gender), civil society, media and potential/actual victims of domestic violence.

Key finding 2 (R_KF_2)

The Project includes 3 streams of actions, each with variable relevance.

Stream of action 1 Capacitating line enforcement body (Ministry of Justice directorate enforcing sanctions) in Montenegro (with human and technical capacities) for the implementation of the protection measure – the bracelet for victim(s) and perpetrator(s) system.

Albeit this stream of action originally targeted Serbia territorially, as the MoI of Serbia decided to withdraw from the Project, the territorial focus was shifted to Montenegro, which a) was in need of the intended support, b) accepted the intended support and c) is already benefiting from the intended support. Hence, trajectory of Project has changed over the life span of the Project due to shifting goals and external factors.

Currently, the stream of action 1 is unambiguously connected, applicable and appropriate to the purpose at hand. There is clear evidence that, following the territorial shift that occurred within the Project, the UNW clearly considered the pertinent

information, data, actions and factors and they planned and implemented related activities that contribute significantly to achieving the intended goals and to addressing the specific objectives of the project. It is not so clear whether the same can be said for the original design of the action.

Bearing in mind the evident need for improving the safety of women in Montenegro, expressed keen interest by the line ministry to expand the implementation of the special protection measure - the bracelet for the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) system (EMS) already in use but in a much smaller scale in Montenegro, and Montenegro UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027, the project responded to those needs and raised the capacity of the line ministry to implement special protection measure in Montenegro at the larger scale.

However, given the current political situation in Montenegro, delayed formation of the Government and anticipated normative changes of the Criminal Code and relevant bylaws, as well as the clear need for the regulation of the coordinated enforcement of the EMS between the MoJ and MoI in the implementation of EMS, it appears that stronger focus and (extended) implementation of, currently not planned, actions is needed, to consolidate the relevance of the Project, within this stream of the action, and in Montenegro specifically.

Analyzing the draft version of the new Criminal Code, one gets the impression that there will be a strong legal basis for the utilization of EMS on the territory of Montenegro. Changing the law certainly requires the stabilization of political conditions in Montenegro, which is expected as of November 2023 (election of a new government and the start of the work of the Parliament). In addition, for the full use of EMS, additional work is needed on the promotion of the System at hand, which could be achieved through the extension of this project.

Stream of action 2 Capacitating the Commissioner for Protection of Equality to raise awareness and confidence of rural women about measures and actors responsible for protection from violence and gender- based discrimination.

The stream of action here addresses broader societal needs related to rural women. According to available evidence, the stream of action serves a larger purpose and fulfills a common relevance requirement, but scarce evidence was found of it contributing directly to achieving the specific goals originally set out related to protection from violence, as the implementation doesn't directly align with the intended objectives. The relevance of this segment of the action (addressing the needs of rural women in Serbia) lies in it directly addressing the unique challenges and opportunities faced by this specific demographic and thereby indirectly reducing rural women's vulnerability to violence. By tailoring initiatives to their needs, the Project empowered and uplifted rural women, promoting social and economic development in rural areas, and therefore addressing gender and area-based discrimination however not exclusively or explicitly targeting protection from violence nor safety. The relevance here was confirmed using the 'outcome harvesting' methods, rather than relying on traditional evaluation methods.

Hence, it can be concluded that while the design did not necessarily intend for it, the stream of actions is and remains relevant and significant.

Additionally, according to the donor's strategic goals in the WB region, it is clear that the donor shows interest in this, either by continuing this project or by designing a special intervention that would target this stream of action. This is especially evident within the priority of the Economic and Social Development, which is listed as one of the three NMFA priorities in WB.

Stream of action 3 Improving knowledge and skills of media and journalists on risks of gender- stereotyping in reporting about VAWG, and femicide.

Both the original design, the intended and implemented arrangements and the trajectory of implementation is found relevant. Media is instrumental in raising awareness, advocating for change, holding individuals and institutions accountable, and empowering women and has the power to shape societal norms and policies, ultimately contributing to the safety and well-being of women. The Project appropriately planned for the interventions here and implemented these as intended. Supported projects in this area may be considered a baseline for a strategic approach by an implementation partner, especially given that in addition to a grant allocation, UNW has made additional efforts to raise the capacity of supported CSOS-media in better monitoring and understanding of the VAWG topic.

Key finding 3 (R_KF_3)

VAGW related actions in both Serbia and Montenegro have ongoing significance, applicability, and importance. Safety of women in Serbia and in Montenegro remains a pertinent, valuable, and a meaningful subject worthy of an external development aid intervention. This continued relevance suggests that the topic/relevant initiatives maintain its importance and utility, in the face of new developments and emerging challenges requiring adaptation as well as continued attention to ensure its continued effectiveness and impact.

Projects addressing the safety of women in Serbia and Montenegro remain continually relevant due to persisting challenges and evolving needs. Gender-based violence, domestic abuse, and harassment still pose serious threats to women. Ongoing initiatives are vital to raise awareness, empower women economically and socially, strengthen legal frameworks, and change societal norms. In addition, as gender dynamics and vulnerabilities evolve, new forms of violence emerge, making it essential to adapt and expand projects to address these evolving threats. Continuous focus on women's safety is fundamental to ensuring their well-being, human rights, and broader societal development in both countries.

However, a more strategic approach towards stakeholders is needed. And although UNW have excellent cooperation with the national stakeholders, the additional advocacy in the VAWG should be made in Serbia. National Stakeholders appear in need to strengthen their knowledge and public policies planning regarding the issue of VWG.

Coherence: The redesigned Project is currently aligned and consistent with the recipient countries' development policies, strategies, and priorities and no inconsistencies were found with the policies and activities of other donors and stakeholders, however, supporting changes in legal and regulatory domain within the EMS system in Montenegro are still needed to ensure adequate coherence of this stream of action.

The Project, in general, complements and does not conflict with other existing development efforts and policies in the sector, apart from rural women uplifting actions that are not yet fully translated into a structured policy measure set in Serbia.

The Project considered the broader development context in which it operated and made an educated effort to harmonize its objectives with those of the recipient countries and other relevant actors, however avenues that could ensure greater synergy internal to the action, while clearly explored and acted upon, did not yield much evident results and success.

Key finding 4 (C_KF_1)

The project is found coherently aligned with UN Women's strategic priorities and their other national initiatives. The action is also found aligned with other interventions implemented by other UN Agencies and with national policies of Serbia and Montenegro. Alignment with the projects of other bilateral donors was not detected.

Key finding 5 (C_KF_2)

Whilst internal project coherence of the project, as planned, exists, is adequate and relates to strong internal coherence between activities, outputs and outcomes; and between indicators and outputs/outcomes; component-to-component synergy has not been fully achieved, at least as per the perception of the interviewed project participants and beneficiaries, who are unaware of the totality of the Project. Whilst this is partially intentional, there remains a larger room for more synergy and joint learning (country to country, in terms of EMS and its initial implementation); stakeholder to stakeholder (media sub-grants and women' CSOs grants, for example, or CEP assistance being linked with women' CSO work). Stronger internal project synergy, referring to the positive interaction and collaboration between ISWS different components, tasks and teams (project team, CEP strategic partners, MNE MoJ staff etc.) could have enhanced overall project performance, and can be planned in the extended period of the Project or otherwise. The project has in fact gathered organizations and individuals with exceptional and diverse skills and expertise, and if they all collaborated more closely on a project (as a whole) their combined knowledge and capabilities could have lead to more innovative solutions and more efficient outcomes.

Key finding 6 (C_KF_3)

Additional efforts are needed to strengthen the coherence of the initial progress made in Montenegro concerning EMS. This entails focusing on legal and regulatory compliance by drafting the necessary rulebook(s) to facilitate the implementation of essential regulatory and enforcement modifications within the system of sanctions and victim protection. The evaluation found that coherence needs to be consolidated vis-à-vis the initial progress related to EMS in Montenegro, which includes ensuring legal and regulatory compliance

through legal drafting of relevant rulebook(s) that support the uptake of necessary regulatory and enforcement changes in the system of sanctions and victim protection. The ISWSMN Project activities in Montenegro have in fact been progressive and had introduced changes that are very significant, but also need to be fully legally regulated to have sustainable effect. Currently, the Project as planned (in particular, given the duration and very short remaining period of implementation) is in fact not in full coherence with the necessary local development processes and does not fully take into account the issues such as justiciability, enforcement staff and normative texts as additional work is required to consolidate introduced changes and the project, as currently defined, does not have resources nor time to finalize them. Therefore, appropriate extension of project is a must, to finalize the work as intended; ensuring that the system effectively meets its objectives, is regulation compliant, adaptable to changing needs, and delivering high-quality performance, for ultimate benefit of victims.

Effectiveness: In overall, the effective success is indicated by the completion of tasks, some of which have the potential to create lasting value and positive impact. Generally speaking, all followed activities are aligned with the project's core purpose and there is evidence of satisfaction of stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The evaluation found that progress as planned has been achieved, but that there still is needed to consolidate success. Following the redesign and mitigation implementation, ISWSMN consistently delivered its defined objectives and desired outcomes, however not within the allocated time and budget. Project strategies were chosen and customized based on the project's goals, the nature of the work, and the specific context in which it operated, 7th risk management strategy and agile strategy were critically important and change management and feedback strategy could have been stronger.

The Project exhibited agile planning, streamlined execution, and adaptability in the face of unforeseen challenges, which is very commendable. It also effectively engaged stakeholders, most via granting and regranteeing processes, maintaining clear communication, and prioritizing quality control. While UNW demonstrated its capacity to proactively address and manage risks within this Project, not all resources were allocated judiciously (at least not at the initial stage) as a cost extension of actions was and still is required.

Key finding 7 (EFV_KF_1)

In the context of evaluating the effectiveness of the Project, the extent to which a project achieved its intended goals and objectives is high. Achieved progress against the outcome targets compared to what was planned or expected, shows no deviations, albeit after the redesign of the initial plans. Project was able to produce tangible and somewhat sustainable results that contribute to the intended UNW developmental intentions and was, after the redesigns and mitigations, successful in delivering the desired benefits and addressing the identified needs of the beneficiary population.

Key finding 8 (EFV_KF_2)

There are various unforeseen results, including extension of initial territorial scope and partnership, extension of target groups, inclusion of emergency support.

Key finding 9 (EFV_KF_3)

Various enabling and challenging factors were identified, including holistic philosophy, agile project management, engaged civil society and media and key stakeholders commitment, standing out factors that enabled effective implementation and Serbian MoI withdrawal from Project, incomplete legal system and limited funding and resources as most challenging factors.

Key finding 10 (EFV_KF_4)

This project was de facto implemented in the context of agile project management. Risks were identified early in the process and mitigated, using agile approach, where success was eventually achieved, Project expanded and intended overall goals obtained.

Efficiency: The Project in overall maximized on the use of available resources, such as time, budget, and personnel, to achieve its objectives and desired outcomes with minimal waste or redundancies. It can be characterized by streamlined processes, effective resource allocation, and proactive risk management and it should be acknowledged that it faced numerous constraints.

While efficiency is reflected in the project's ability to deliver high-quality results, it still did not meet overall original timelines and also did not manage to stay within the allocated budget.

In overall, the project had made attempts to optimize its operations, minimize unnecessary complexities, and has demonstrates an adaptability to changing circumstances.

Tasks were successfully completed and there is evidence of cost-effectiveness.

As per the donor view, this was one of the most visible projects they have supported in the last few years, especially compared to other UN agencies' projects of similar size and scope.

A relative assessment of the investment of resources and complexity vis-à-vis project components signifies that the allocation of resources, including time, effort, and budget, has been judicious, although originally overambitious.

Key finding 11 (EFC_KF_1)

Management and leadership of the project seem efficient – with high capacities to plan, organize and monitor project implementation, to coordinate various stakeholders and achieve good collaboration with the stakeholders. The challenges, including those related to COVID-19 and political instability, were addressed with high professionalism and success. It is however the impression of the evaluators that the project team was understaffed in some perspectives. Some delays were noted – in relation to CEP component which was explained by changes in the UN Women accounting system (in the HQ). Both cost and duration extensions were required, and this evaluation also advocates that this need still exists, in relation to activities to be implemented and consolidated in Montenegro.

Impact: There are long-term effects and changes resulting from the Project that go beyond the immediate and short-term results, some of which are broader, sustainable and transformative, in particular those related to the initial implementation of EMS in Montenegro.

Project has included various promising practices in relation to Roma and rural women in Serbia, and also some activities, mainly public information related, have had catalytic effect.

Key finding 12 (I_KF_1)

The project has certainly contributed to safety of women and girls in Serbia and Montenegro, however the overall impact towards this overarching goal is difficult to measure. Activities and achieved results are found as positively impacting gender equality and also safety, whereas stronger impact towards improved safety is observed in Montenegro and stronger impact towards improved socio-economic status of rural women in Serbia. Activities directed towards media are found very positively impacting overall population and are an avenue worth replicating elsewhere and disseminating further as they also have attributes of a stream of action that may yield a catalytic effect.

Sustainability: A medium-level prospects of sustainability is observed involving a mix of financial stability, moderate institutional capacity, and partial policy integration. While the project secures some ongoing funding, local institutions require further strengthening, and only partial policy changes are institutionalized, indicating room for improvement in ensuring long-term impact.

Key finding 13 (S_KF_1)

The Project was implemented partially using replication methods and was successful in initiating and transferring EMS practices in Montenegro, as well as in initiating innovative practices of women uplifting in Serbia, also creatively collaborating with the media there. Its potential for further replication is good, and there are immediate opportunities for the upscaling in Montenegro, as further supporting the processes until the system is fully developed and reaching a certain routine in implementation is needed. MNE has assumed financial obligations for the staff and the IT maintenance.

Human rights and gender equality: The project, overall, seamlessly integrated gender equality and human rights principles into all aspects of its design and implementation. Evidence suggests that the Project largely ensured equal opportunities for all, challenged area based and gender discrimination, and promoted rights and dignity. Further improvements could have taken place around disability inclusion and overall, around inclusive consultations.

Key finding 14 (HRGE_KF_1)

Gender and human rights principles and strategies are in the core of the Project, which is reflected in the initial design of the Project, its redesigned outlook and all the way through its implementation. The Project particularly took into account the needs and rights of various groups of vulnerable women) with paying respect to the highest human rights standards.

Key finding 15 (HRGE_KF_2)

The Project generally follows the UN Women strategic commitments to fully dedicate to mainstreaming disability inclusion throughout its work, in line with disability inclusion strategy and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, the evaluation evidence has not identified any structured corresponding measures of it within the project's execution so far. Within media sub-grants a CSO gathering women with disabilities was awarded, and across the board, there were signs of realistic disability inclusion and also of collaboration with organizations specializing in disability inclusion.

Added value: An additional value of a project improving the safety of women and girls implemented by UN Women is the promotion of international collaboration and best practices. UN Women's projects often serve as global models, fostering knowledge exchange and inspiring similar initiatives worldwide, thereby enhancing the global movement for women's safety and rights. UN Women's comparative advantages as an implementing partner include its expertise in gender equality, vast network of partners and stakeholders, and a strong commitment to women's empowerment.

Key findings 16 (AV_KF_1)

The Project demonstrates the unique expertise and comparative advantage of UN Women vis-à-vis other international and bilateral stakeholders engaged in the promotion of gender equality. The experiences also show that Norway has once again shown its crucial value as a donor that supports topics of particular importance to society, such as the protection of women and girls from violence. A particularly observed added value is the cooperation with the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, which proved to be a good model of cooperation between national stakeholders, UN agencies, and this donor.

Recommendations

General recommendations

Recommendation 1 (R_1):

ISWSMN Project activities in Montenegro would greatly benefit from an extension to consolidate and further enhance their relevance and ensure greater coherence in the overall action.

Recommendation 2 (R_2):

Further explore strengthening of the relevance in projects using calls for proposals (grants, re-granting, sub-granting) by involving potential applicants in consultation processes before calls/grants are launched/implemented/awarded.

Recommendation 3 (R_3):

UNW could explore further interlinkages between economic empowerment and VAGW, as it may provide women with the means to improve their safety and reduce their

vulnerability to violence, within the broader efforts to promote gender equality and reduce violence against women, with perhaps a stronger focus on survivors and greater VAGW related ambition in terms of outcome targets.

Recommendation 4 (C_1):

Increase the familiarity of the project participants, partners and stakeholders on the totality of the ISWSMN, by an online ISWSMN gathering, or through preparing of a brief aide memoire which lists all streams of actions, costs and achieved progress, to the benefit of transparency, learning and improved collaboration.

Recommendation 5 (EFV_1):

UNW should recognize the key finding 8 and continue to specifically favor agile project management in their future projects, where requirements are extended to change and where the end goal is not fully known at the outset. Agile project management contrasts with traditional project management methods, that donor organizations and UN system are still mainly accustomed to, and where anticipated trajectories follow a more linear and sequential approach. As the UNW mission in fact tackles what is in theory known as ‘wicked problems’¹, and as authors agree that ‘systems thinking’ and ‘agile approach’ are best fit to address such problems, the experiences of this Project can pave the way to some innovative approaches in future projects, that can increase the overall effectiveness of the UNS as the implementing agency.

Recommendation 6 (EFC_1):

Any new budget planning cycle should be based on updated market research, renewed capacity assessment of partners’ absorption capacities, which may be higher than assumed in some cases.

Recommendation 7 (EFC_2):

Consider elevating current UNW project presence in Serbia to a fully-fledged Country Office, which would increase overall efficiency in project management and safeguard against unnecessary delays and interferences.

Recommendation 8 (EFC_3):

Some further robustness of the result framework may have helped to capture changes, and introduction of process related indicators may further support change management around EMS, but also around rural women uplifting. Further outcome reporting, i.e. communicating results to stakeholders and using them for decision-making and accountability could be considered for future actions.

Recommendation 9 (I_1):

¹ Wicked problems are problems with many interdependent factors making them seem impossible to solve. Because the factors are often incomplete, in flux, and difficult to define, solving wicked problems requires a deep understanding of the stakeholders involved, and an innovative approach provided by design thinking. Complex issues such as healthcare and education are examples of wicked problems. In the context of UNW the gender stereotypes can also be seen as an example of wicked problems. The term “wicked problem” was first coined by Horst Rittel, design theorist and professor of design methodology at the Ulm School of Design, Germany, in the paper “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning”.

Consider developing RACER indicators on the level of impact in the future, to capture, not fully attainable, but still indicated, changes at the overall objective levels in development project, as monitoring against there can also help shape interventions and track progress.

Recommendation 10 (HRGE_1):

Consider engaging directly with women from marginalized groups during project planning and implementation to ensure their voices are heard, and their needs are integrated into the intervention and including them directly in advisory project hierarchy to provide input, express concerns, and make suggestions for improvement in future similar projects. In particular, consider involving women with disabilities or their representative organizations in project planning and decision-making to ensure their voices are heard.

Specific recommendations:

Recommendation 1 (RS_1):

Publish the Reporting Guide (*“Prirucnik za eticko i nediskriminatorno izvestavanje o nasilju prema zenama u online sferi”*) at locally used websites in Serbia to increase the relevance of implemented results.

Recommendation 2 (EFVS_1):

Before the final reporting, slight amendment of the indicator for the outcome 2 is recommended to more specifically capture the progress achieved, specifying numbers of people outreached in VAGW related matters, and numbers of people (women) outreached in sense of economic/civil empowerment.

Lessons learnt

Lesson learnt 1:

Holistic approach and hybrid designs can be helpful but should be approached also with more sophisticated/complex/better adjusted management and coordination.

Lesson learnt 2:

Grants and regranting programs can enhance the effectiveness of projects and contribute to sustainability.